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C O N F I D E N T I A L ASUNCION 000188

SIPDIS

DEPT PASS USAID LAC/AA  
NSC FOR TOM SHANNON/KIM BREIER  
SOUTHCOM FOR POLAD DAN JOHNSON

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/06/2015  
TAGS: PREL PGOV PINR PA  
SUBJECT: PARAGUAY TO END CUBAN DOCTORS PROGRAM

REF: 04 ASUNCION 1602

Classified By: Charge Kevin M. Johnson, reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

¶1. (U) On February 4, Minister of Health Julio Cesar Velasquez announced that the GOP will terminate a program that brings doctors from Cuba to live and practice in rural areas of Paraguay. According to the announcement, the current group of Cuban doctors set to finish in December will be the last. Paraguayan doctors trained in Cuba and required to serve in rural areas for one year will take the place of their Cuban counterparts.

¶2. (C) Comment: Although the announcement was innocuously worded to sound as if an increasing supply of Paraguayan doctors were eliminating the need for the Cuban doctors, the GOP's decision is more likely a reflection of President Duarte's growing unease with leftist activities in the country. Minister of the Interior Nelson Mora recently told EmbOff that Duarte's patience had run out due to the involvement of a local leftist party, Patria Libre, in a major kidnapping. There is evidence of FARC connections to Patria Libre, and reported plans for wider criminal and subversive activity in the countryside have alarmed and angered the GOP (ref A and septel to follow).  
JOHNSON